

## Rise

In point 79 of the Acts of the General Chapter 2023, you can read this: *“We, Religious of the Sacred Heart, become conscious of our limits linking us to our present life: loss of enthusiasm for the Ecce Venio, utopic conversion, pessimism for the future, agnostic attitude, shutting ourselves in our own security, carrierism, fear of novelty, etc.”*

“Rise” is an invitation to renew the desire of life that seems to have abandoned us. “Rise and walk”: but if I walk, who am I afterwards? As long as I am not walking, I can cling to the memory of an education and training I received and which I consider, in some respects, as a disastrous, but secure, reality. To rise, it is to accept once more the challenge of life. My stretcher shall only be a memory I will bring with me. But it won’t carry me anymore, while justifying my state of starvation. From now on, I will carry it, thus breaking any link of slavery and lack of desire.

Jesus presents himself and tells me: “Do you want to be cured?” It is up to me to choose between two feelings: to be laughed at, or to be grasped by Someone’s hand.

### Lectio divina Jn 5:1-18

**The place.** We are in Jerusalem in the district “Betzathà” or Betesda (= *house of mercy or Kindness*) in an important group of swimming-pools built some tens of meters away from the Temple. Started by King Ezechias (VIII-VII century before Christ), this monumental work was enlarged at the time of Herod the Great, then profaned by Hadrian in 135 after Christ, with the building of a pagan temple dedicated to Eusculape, the God of medicine. The archaeologists have discovered the remnants of a pagan cult to healing deities, in contradiction with the faith in God, source of life.

The basins contained water used for purifying the altar of sacrifices, for washing the sheep (in Greek “probata”) destined to be immolated, for the ritual purification of a person entering the Temple. One of the basins was filled with spring water considered as miraculous, in which crippled, lame, blind or paralyzed people were plunged.

**The occasion.** “There was a Jewish feast”. It is probably a shabbat, when each Jew is

invited to rest, to enter God's time. The man, paralyzed for thirty-eight years, does not succeed neither in entering the pool, nor the time of rest, nor God's Temple, since the access to this pool was forbidden to paralyzed and disabled people. This is why they were obliged to stay outside the pool. This man can't enter the feast, he is waiting to be able to dive into the "berakhà" (pool) in the hope of being cured and receiving the "berekhà" (blessing) from God. A person is considered as blessed by God when it is immersed in Him. Later, the catechumens were immersed in the baptismal fonts, that is to say immersed in Christ, to be inserted in Him and live from Him.

**Question in the shape of a provocation.** "Do you want to be cured?" (Jn 5,6). By this question, Jesus wants to shake the paralytic deeply, he who was used to his stretcher, settled in his infirmity, imprisoned in his feeling of victim, without any hope and with a wish to be cured that had become blurred. Israël too, walking towards the Promised Land during 38 years, was tempted to walk back because, disappointed, it was afraid to look forward to the future aim, the Promised Land. It can also happen to us to stay on the threshold of the Promised Land, like this paralytic who, while being a step near being cured and having the pool in front of him, could not enter it.

**Waiting for help.** "Lord, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up!" (Jn 5-7). So the paralytic was waiting for a man to put him into the pool. How is it possible that this sick man has not found a good soul to make him go down into the pool water? How is it that he has not succeeded in plunging into these waters during so many years, at least once? Jesus does not treat him with tenderness; he does not lift him, does not fondle him, does not take his hand. Jesus finds himself in front of a person who needs, before everything, to get out of his feeling of being a victim, of his unhealthy complacency which prevents him to be cured. This paralytic does not want to take up his illness and the possibility of being cured. Jesus reminds him that he must not depend on others, but use his personal resources and make dignity and courage rise from them. Jesus does not want this man to look down anymore, towards the stirring water, towards the forces of nature which prevent him from looking towards wider horizons. For us, the horizon is Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior. He is the pool in which we wish to be plunged. At that moment, the paralytic does not understand, but in him the hope he had lost long ago was born again..

**Three imperatives.** "Rise, take up your stretcher, and walk!" (Jn 5:8). By curing the paralytic, Jesus's aim is not only to make him healthy again, but to restore his condition of free man. The paralytic is cured when he decides to believe not only in the words of Jesus, but also in his personal capacities. To rise is a benediction and to walk is a benediction prolonged in time. Why does Jesus insist on the injunction: "Take up your stretcher"? Why doesn't he order him to get rid of it, as this bed has become useless? Now, it belongs to his personal history. Israël too, at Easter, commemorates its slavery and liberation. Each liberation is lived in joy and with joy. This bed, which for 38 years had been for the paralytic an instrument of condemnation and malediction, now become the trophy of a victory, to rise with exultation and joyful cries, and to show to the crowds as a testimony of the miracle. Jesus is the Savior of the weakest, of the most abandoned and neglected by all.

**A new discovery.** As soon as he was cured, the paralytic went into the Temple to praise the

Lord, which he had not done for 38 years. Because of his physical condition, the Law forbade him to do so. Now he is cured and purified. “You have been made well” (Jn 5,14). The paralytic did not know who his thaumaturge was; now, in the Temple, they are facing one another. What did they say one to the other? “Not to sin anymore”! Of course. One can also imagine that Jesus told him about his Father: a Father who plays a central role in the Old Testament, recognized by his sons (Ex 10,12); a Father who instructs (Si 30,3), blesses (Gen 27, 27-30), corrects (Si 30,2), waits for the time of children (Col 3,21), and loves them (2 Sam 19,1; Lc 15,20). Time had come for this paralytic to re-discover the beauty of the Temple and to taste the Lord’s kindness. From the pool to the Temple, he had walked hardly some tens of meters. In a few minutes, he passed from a situation maintaining him tied up to a bed and a slave to the rumors of the people about this water considered as miraculous, to the meeting of a person who gives him everything and opens for him a much wider horizon. Now, this paralytic can look up to the sky, for he doesn’t need to scrutinize the bottom of a pool.

### **An experience among others.**

We are in 1981, during Lent. In Tuscany, the houses are blessed. I have been sent there for a few days to help the community of Montemurlo, in a mission in a very wide parish. Not far from the church, a man was living, known by everyone as a violent anticlerical and inveterate communist. At that time, he fell seriously ill and there was no hope of recovery. His wife, a very pious woman, came and told the priest, Fr. Albino Tameri, about the situation. What to do? The woman was praying so that her husband, who had forgotten who God was, might die “in God’s grace”. One evening, Fr. Albino and myself, in civil clothes, went to pay a visit to the family. We sat down in the sick man’s bedroom with other people coming to show their sympathy. No prayer, only the usual common courtesy. Two days later, we came back. Same scene. Back in the presbytery, the woman came to tell us that her husband felt some suspicions and wondered whether we were priests, as he had never seen us before. “He wants to see you”, the sick man’s wife said.

Back into this house and after entering the bedroom, the sick man said abruptly: “You are priests? Well, I want to put my conscience in order before dying”. Fr. Albino beckoned the other persons present to go out, to be able to hear his confession. The sick man stopped everybody and, with a loud voice, said: “I want to confess myself publicly because I am a public sinner”. This gentleman died a few days later, happy and in God’s grace. This discreet presence of two persons, never seen before, succeeded in awakening the conscience of this convinced and “professional eater of priests” communist. God did the rest..

### **Thoughts of Blessed John-Paul I.**

It is precisely in the places and situations where people are living, struggling, hoping, grasping sometimes in their fists their failures and lack of success, that Christ has at heart to bring God’s presence.

Time has not come to stop, to admit oneself beaten, to moor the boat to the bank and look backwards...

To keep aloof with this sweet sadness and this ironical cynism... To find again the hope which

comes after failure or tiresome...

To be a pilgrim, it is to walk towards an aim or while looking for an aim. There is always the danger of walking in a labyrinth, where there is no aim...

A Church where any christian might feel himself a son and not a subject, loved and not “commanded”, sharing and not under an influence.

A Church which would go back to its original maternity, taking off those age-long incrustations which would risk to transform her more into a mother-in-law than into a mother. In short, a Church faithful to Vatican II.

## Pists for a community sharing.

The community where I am living now, is it a Betzathà, that is to say *a house of mercy or of kindness*? Am I able to consider my brother in faith as the one who belongs to me, to know how to share his joys and sufferings? Am I able to “make room for the brother, by carrying his burdens, and refusing rivalry, carrierism, mistrust and jealousies?” (R.of L 96 b.d; 84). If I don’t rise up, I won’t be able to walk..

Have you already lived an experience similar to the paralytic: to stay without help for long? Either because I have never asked for it, or because it has been refused to me? Perhaps it was comfortable to remain in this situation and find excuses: “Lord, I have no one to plunge me into the pool when the water is stirred!” If you don’t want to walk, so remain lying on your stretcher (cf R.of L. 104).

Saint Augustin says that desire is the hand stretched to welcome the gift:”God widens our desire, he widens our spirit by dilating it, he augments its capacity”. Jesus, by his concrete example, reveals to us the heart of God, full of mery and compassion. Do I pay attention to the poorer? “The Religious and the communities take part in the initiatives in favor of human rights, protection of the Creation, quality of life and defense of the weakest...” (R.of L. 116) In our sphere of life and mission, who are today the persons excluded, and what are the poverties which I exclude? Do you perceive around you signs of solidarity? Widen your tent!

*Take your strecher!* We are invited not to let us block by our history, by our wounds, but to call them always by their names, to take them in our hands and carry them ourselves. We are called to desire our true happiness, what is according to the Gospel. If my heart doesn’t open to the wish of changing speed, I risk to spend my life lying or carried away by the events, without precise aim. If I stand up, I realize I can walk, and if I walk, I will know how to find the aim towards which I must go. To enter God’s house, the Shekina, to embrace the Father who is always waiting for me. (R. of L. 78).

As Religious of the Sacred Heart, we would like to watch the future with faith, love and hope. God’s grace supports us in our mission which is to be capable, free, open Religious? (Acts of the General Chapter 2023, n° 80)



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